

Superintendent's Quarters (Buchanan House)  
United States Naval Academy  
Annapolis  
Anne Arundel County  
Maryland

HABS No. MD-329.5

HABS  
MD,  
2-ANNA.  
65/5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS

MD,

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

2 - ANNA,

SUPERINTENDENT'S QUARTERS  
(Buchanan House)

6515-

HABS No. MD-329-5

Location: United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

Present Owner: United States Government.

Present Occupant and Use: Residence of the Superintendent of the Naval Academy.

Significance: With the companion Administration Building on the opposite side of the Chapel, the Superintendent's Quarters forms an important part of Ernest Flagg's Beaux-Arts scheme for the United States Naval Academy. With the other two buildings (Chapel and Administration Building), it closes the western edge of the formally organized quadrangle. Unlike the other Flagg Buildings, the Superintendent's Quarters is domestic, rather than monumental, in scale, and provides a distinct contrast to the buildings in its immediate vicinity.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1906 (date of plans).
2. Architect: Ernest Flagg
3. Builder, contractor, Stahle, Bean and Bean, Annapolis, Maryland.
4. Original plans and construction: The house retains its original appearance with the exception of the enclosure of two sun porches on the north and south elevations. The interior also remains essentially the same, though minor changes have been made in the location and access to bathrooms on the second and third floors and in the service areas on the first and basement floors. Flagg's original working plans and elevations are retained by the USNA office of real estate. In addition to linen sheets of plans, are some preliminary tracings with heating and plumbing specifications. The total cost of the original structure was \$77,539. (Source: USNA Archives Correspondence and Memoranda on Superintendent's Quarters). The USNA Archives also retains several photographs of the exterior and interior, dating from 1911 to the 1960s. The files also contain extensive correspondence and official memos from the various Superintendents regarding the maintenance of the house and its furnishings. Flagg published an article in The American Architect in 1908 discussing in detail his plans for the Academy, including a plan of the main floor and garden and a view of the east elevation of the Superintendent's Quarters. (Volume XCIV, No. 1697, July 1, 1908.)

5. Alterations and Additions: The south sun porch on the first floor was enclosed prior to 1920. The enclosure consisted of placing glass and wood-paneled screens between the existing porch columns and inside the railing. A memo from a Superintendent during the 1920s suggests that these panels were removable and may have alternated with wire screens for summer use. Archives photographs of the exterior during the 1930s and the interior of the porch in 1941 indicate the enclosure soon became permanent. The round columns had been squared off and the railing had been removed. The exposed brick of the house wall was painted but not covered.

In 1956, the north sun porch, which had remained open, but was covered by an awning during much of the year, was enclosed in the same manner as the south porch. This alteration necessitated the infill of the large arched window on the south elevation, which lit the main stair landing between the basement and first floor. The lower panels in the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  story vertical window above the arched window were also covered at this time. The brick wall remains exposed in the porch interior, but a large silver and china wall cabinet installed at the time of the alteration prevents the verification of the location of the arched window infill.

#### B. Historical Context

The Superintendent's Quarters are an important element of the U.S. Naval Academy plan designed by Ernest Flagg, being one of the three buildings composing the western edge of the quadrangle around which the campus centers. The plan is quintessentially Beaux-Arts in all aspects, with a symmetrical axial layout of the buildings, open space and connecting walks. The west side of the plan is dominated by the Chapel, but the subordinate Superintendent's Quarters and Administration Building on either side serve important roles as visual and functional termini of secondary axes underlying the major cross axis of the quadrangle. Prior to 1906, the Superintendents occupied two other buildings on the Academy grounds, the last of which was built from 1883-1886 and demolished to make way for the present house. The expectation that the Superintendent would be close to the heart of the complex was thus a well-established tradition. Flagg accordingly designed a house to fulfil the major needs of the Superintendent to provide ample living quarters for his family and equally capacious entertainment areas, since the position involves both ceremonial and social duties.

In order to sustain the heavy social activity required of the Superintendent, a permanent staff of servants had to be housed in the Quarters, with a series of service areas near the entertainment rooms. The plan devoted most of the ground floor to service rooms and provided convenient access to the upper floors via service stairs and a dumbwaiter. The garden in the rear of the house was also easily within reach of the service rooms and the driveway on the north side of the house next to the Chapel.

The house was called the Superintendent's Quarters, reflecting its military purpose, until 1976, when it was named Buchanan House, after the first Superintendent of the Academy, Commander Franklin Buchanan. Since its construction it has housed 31 superintendents and many visiting statesmen and diplomats. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was a frequent visitor during the 1930s, being a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the World War I. An entrance ramp was provided during this period for his visits and in 1935 a closet flanking the main entrance on the first floor was converted to a bathroom for his convenience. The most frequent guests continue to be midshipmen and parents in a constant round of social events during the academic year.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Superintendent's Quarters is a vital part of the overall Academy plan because of its siting and function. It is an excellent example of the American Beaux-Arts tradition in architecture.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is in excellent condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The principal elevation on the east is a symmetrical three-bay, center-dominant, composition of two-and-a-half stories, with mirror-image sun porches flanking the main section. The side elevations on the north and south are also three bays, with the sun-porch enclosures obscuring the first floor bays. On these elevations, the basement is exposed, with access for service on the north and a circular guest entrance drive an an open piazza on the south. The rear, or west, elevation duplicates the front elevation except for a wider central bay, a semi-circular terrace at the first floor level, and a screened service area at the basement level.

The main section, excluding the enclosed porches, is 60'-6" by 52'-6" and is 39' high to the eaves and 54' high at the front elevation ridge.

2. Foundations: The foundations are brick on concrete footings.
3. Walls: The exterior finish is a pale gray brick, the same used in other major Academy buildings designed by Flagg. The walls are 12-3/4 inches thick. Belt courses between the first and second floors and at the top of the second floor windows are granite, as are the window sills. The belt courses break to form keystones above the major windows of the second story.
4. Structural systems, framing: Probably masonry-bearing wall with steel-reinforced concrete. The roof frame is timber.

5. Porches, balconies: The north and south sun porches are enclosed by panels separated by square paneled and glazed pairs of casement windows of six lights each. The panels are separated by square paneled pilasters. Those on the south porch may enclose the original circular porch columns. At the east and west ends of both porches are doors, glazed and paneled in the same manner as the casements.

The front entrance has a split Renaissance stair in granite with a cast iron railing in a serpentine pattern. A concrete planter is centered between the staircases.

The guest entrance on the south is entered via an open piazza under the sun porch on the first floor. This porch has square brick piers on granite bases.

The first floor has an open, railed balcony, or deck, on the west or garden side. This deck originally followed the squared outline of the rear elevation, but was altered (probably after 1950) to a semi-circular shape. The deck is supported on square wood piers with slightly curved beam ends. It extends across the west end of the sun porches, terminating in curving granite steps leading down to the garden. The entire deck is often covered by a canvas awning over a permanent framework attached to the wall of the house.

6. Chimneys: The house has four large interior brick chimneys.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front doorway has double screen doors with a square glazed transom over double paneled doors with brass knobs and hinges. The opening is shaded by a cast iron and glass marquee supported on oversized scrolled brackets. The guest entry on the south elevation also has screens and a glass and paneled door, as well as a glass and iron marquee. Flanking this entrance are cast-iron wall sconces with globe lights in the form of torches. The west elevation has double French doors opening onto the deck. In addition, double doors with paneled bases open from the north and south sun porches to the deck. Other doors in the west and north elevations at the basement level serve the kitchen and servants' areas.
  - b. Windows and shutters: The first floor fenestration on the front and rear elevations is casement with 10 lights in each panel and a two-light transom above each panel. The second floor windows are eight-over-eight double-hung sash flanked by louvered shutters. Narrow slit windows on the second-floor level occur between the center and end bays. On the third-floor, the dormer windows are eight-over-eight double-hung sash. Above the slit windows on the front elevation are small oculus windows with scrolled copper hoods. The piazza on the south elevation has eight-over-eight, double-hung sash.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is a slate mansard with copper flashing and gutters.
- b. Cornice: A modillion cornice encircles the house. Above it is a low parapet which becomes a balustrade in front of the central dormer of the front and rear elevations. The parapet is also broken by the dormer windows on all elevations.
- c. Dormers: There are three wall dormers with hipped roofs on each elevation.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement floor rooms are arranged around the central hall leading to the main staircase from the guest entrance on the south. Immediately to the north of the doorway is a foyer with concave side walls. To the right, along the east side of the house, are ladies' men's lounges and toilets. To the left, on the west side, are servants' rooms and the kitchen. Access to this area is through a short hall perpendicular to the main hall. On the north end of the hall is the main stairway to the first floor. To the right of the staircase is a door leading into the service hall, with access to the service driveway. On either side of the service hall are a flower room, laundry room, food locker, servants' day room, pantry, and the service stairway.
- b. First floor: The first floor is oriented around the central hall on an east-west axis. A foyer with curving walls like that on the basement floor is immediately inside the doorway. A small closet and toilet flank the doorway. From the front entrance the hall leads directly west toward the double doors of the dining room. On the south side of the hall is a fireplace flanked by openings to the drawing room. On the north side of the hall are the door to the library and the stairway. The drawing room is symmetrical with a fireplace on the south wall, and French doors on either side leading into the sun porch. At the southwest corner of the room is a smaller doorway into the smoking room (now a music room). At the northwest corner, similar opening gives access to the dining room,

The south sun porch is a long rectangular space with doors at the east and west ends. The smoking room is a small square room on the southwest wall of the house with a fireplace on its north wall and a window on the west looking onto the rear

deck. A doorway in the northeast corner leads to the dining room. The dining room is the largest room on the first floor. From the double doors to the hall the rectangular room is symmetrical, with French door directly opposite on the west side leading to the deck. On either side of the French doors are windows. A large fireplace is on the south wall facing an arched sideboard niche on the north end. To the right of this niche is the door to the butler's pantry, now a kitchen for family use. This area also contains the service stairway.

The library is located to the right or north of the main hall. This room has a fireplace on the interior west wall and a doorway in the northeast corner leading to the north sun porch. The plan of this porch is identical to that of the south porch except for a pair of folding doors about ten feet from the east end of the room. A half partition with an arched central opening is in the same position at the west end, forming a small breakfast room with access to the kitchen and rear deck.

A main stairway is in an ell off the northwest corner of the main hall. A small door opens from the stair hall to the library. The stair is a double run, with the half-landing between the first and second floors lit by the vertical window described previously.

- c. Second floor: The second floor consists of six bedrooms and four bathrooms arranged around a central hall with a stairway to the third floor. Rooms on the west side of the hall are the family bedrooms; those on the east and south are guest rooms. Each section is entered via small anterooms opening from the hall.
  - d. Third floor: The third floor consists of eight bedrooms and two bathrooms. These were extra guest rooms and servants bedrooms. Six are in use as bedrooms at the present time and two are storage rooms. The arrangement is similar to that of the second floor, but more constricted in room size and corridor access. The stairwell rises in the center to a hall with doors to the guest rooms on the side and the servants rooms on the west. Each area is served by a corridor running north-south. A single larger room on the south has a direct opening to the stairhall.
2. Stairways: The main stairway has three turned balusters per tread and a mahogany contoured railing. The string is decorated with scroll carving. The second floor stairs are serpentine and also have a mahogany rail. The string is undecorated. The service stairs are utilitarian, narrow and winding, with no decoration.
  3. Flooring: Floors throughout the main rooms are oak, tongue-and-groove boards. Many of the rooms on the upper floors are entirely carpeted, as are the hall and lounges on the basement floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Most walls and ceilings outside the service areas are plaster, painted a cream color. The first floor rooms have the most elaborate wall and ceiling finishes. These are described by room below:

Central Hall: The hall has a deep cornice formed by various moldings, including an ovolo among plainer types. Two plaster medallions with scroll and foliated patterns surrounds chandelier pendants in the center of the ceiling. The walls were formerly papered in a flocked or brocade pattern, according to a photograph date 1920-21, in the Archives.

Drawing Room: The walls have panels formed by astragal and bolection moldings. The cornice includes a bundled bay-leaf torus and acanthus leaf cyma moldings. The outlines of these moldings are blurred by successive layers of paint.

Sun Porch: The ceiling is narrow tongue-and-groove boards. The brick wall of the house is exposed, but has been painted several times.

Smoking or Music Room: The walls are painted plaster. The cornice is coved and defined by molding.

Dining Room: The walls are plaster with panels formed by molding. The cornice has dentil, ovolo, and acanthus moldings. The walls were formerly wainscoted with recessed wood paneling and had patterned wallpaper above the top molding of the panels, as pictured in a photograph dated 1920-21 in the Archives.

Library: The walls in this room are paneled plaster where not obscured by large built-in bookcases. The cornice is coved and an elaborate foliated scroll and lattice medallion surrounds a central light pendant, but the fixture has been removed.

Basement Hall: The walls are painted plaster and the cornice is coved. Corbels define the edge of the stairwell.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The drawing room, dining room and library have French doors leading to the sun porches and the rear balcony deck. The double doors to the dining room from the central hall are mahogany with recessed panels. The library has a sliding door to the hall that disappears into the paneled soffit of the opening. The openings to the drawing room and dining room from the hall have architraves with projecting top shelves.

The drawing room elevations of these openings have the same architrave overdoors. The dining room overdoor has paneled side pilasters supporting a foliated frieze with sunburst corner blocks.



- b. Skylights: A square skylight with grid muntins and opaque glass lights the third floor stairwell.

6. Decorative features and trim:

a. Fireplaces:

Central Hall: The mantel is wood with bolection molding and a dentil cornice. The surround and hearth are striated green marble and the firebox is slate with paneled sides. The shelf has a cavetto molding supporting a tri-partite gilded Adamesque mirror.

Drawing Room: The mantelpiece is the same as the hall mantel but the surround is black and white marble. The shelf supports a large gilt mirror.

Smoking or Music Room: The mantel here is the same as in the hall and drawing room, but the surround and hearth are of black and gray marble.

Dining Room: This is the most elaborate mantel in the house. The blank frieze and dentil cornice are supported by fluted half-round columns. The surround is of green striated marble, as in the hall.

Library: The mantel is the same as in the hall.

- b. Cabinets: The Library has two built-in bookcases flanking the east window.

- 7. Hardware: The front entry and most major doors have brass hinges and other hardware. The knobs have a nautical motif.
- 8. Lighting: The original lighting fixtures remain in the main hall and basement hall. In the main hall, two four-branch bronze chandeliers of dolphins with ropes hang by chains from the plaster ceiling medallions. These originally had round opaque globes but are now lit with modern chandelier bulbs. An identical chandelier hangs in the basement hall. The original dining room chandelier was identical to those in the hall, but in 1967, a Waterford crystal chandelier dating from circa 1840-1860 was presented to the Academy for the dining room. It originally hung in the Dodge Hotel in Washington, D.C.

In the drawing room, dining room and stairwell are a number of two-branch wall sconces with dolphins matching the chandeliers in the hall. The sconces now have crystal pendants but originally had opaque globes.

9. Call System: A modern intercom system connects the upper floors with the servants' rooms in the basement. Prior to its installation, servants were summoned by "yelling down the dumbwaiter," in the words of one Superintendent's memo in the Archives.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house has two compass orientations because of its double entries. The first floor family entrance faces east toward the quadrangle. The guest entry at the basement level faces south toward Oahlgren Hall. The house is set apart from the quad by a low brick wall, which continues around the corner at the south and forms a gate with brick piers on granite bases with low granite curles ending at cannon gate posts flanking the driveway. The drive is circular, around a large spruce tree. The north side of the house faces the Chapel and is separated from it by retaining walls bordering the service driveway.
2. Landscape Design: The entire west side of the site is occupied by the garden. Flagg's original plan included the garden in its present size and shape, suggesting a formal layout based on an 18th-century French landscape design. The plantings have been altered over the years, but the axuality of the original design has been retained. Diagonal gravel walks meet at a central fountain. A small arbor faces the house from the west end of the garden. At various times vegetables have been grown in the garden and, during World War II, ducks and turkeys were kept there. At the present time an arbor of wisteria borders the south side of the garden. A modern weathered wood fence with rustic gates encircles the garden.
3. Outbuildings: The only outbuilding is a three-car garage located in the service driveway.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Flagg's original plans, sections, and working drawings, as well as subsequent alteration drawings for bathroom remodelings, floor plans, and engineering systems are retained at the Academy's Office of Real Estate. The floor plan of 1906 indicates the curved-wall foyer was originally more rectangular, incorporating the space on either side of the door now occupied by a closet and toilet. The closets were apparently a revision prior to construction.
- B. Early Views: These are described in Section I, A. 4.: Original plans and construction.

C. Bibliography:

Flagg, Ernest, "New Buildings for the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland," in The American Architect and Buildings News, in two parts: Vol. XCIV, No. 1697, July 1, 1908; and No. 1698, July 8, 1908.

U.S. Naval Academy Archives: memos and correspondence files on Superintendent's Quarters.

"Buchanan House," pamphlet available at the house.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This work was produced by John D. Hnedak, Architectural Historian, Annapolis, Maryland, as consultant to the National Architectural and Engineering Record, with the assistance of Janet Davis, Architectural Historian, Baltimore, Maryland. We gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance of Mrs. Price of the Naval Academy Archives, Nimitz Hall, and her staff; of Mr. E. B. Miles of the Office of Public Works, Naval Academy and of the staff who work with him in the Office of Real Estate, the Plan Vault and the Duplicating Room; and of Captain Gaworkowitz at the Office of Public Works.